



Hampshire Hockey Umpires' Association

www.hampshirehockeyassociation.co.uk

Umpiring – First Game Survival Tips

This guide is in two parts:

- 12 tips for the club, captains, and colleague;
- 20 tips for the first time umpire.

Getting club members to umpire

Hockey needs a supply of umpires. The county association can help, but nearly every umpire, at any level, first umpired for a local club.

Like players, umpires give up or move away, and without a steady stream of new recruits, a gap can become a crisis. The traditional approach is to send some club members on the Level 1 course. But new umpires still face the challenge of that first full game. For many it is too much: having not umpired before the course, they do not umpire after it either. Surely an expensive waste of potential?

A more effective approach is to identify and develop the club members who enjoy umpiring: each season offering the whistle to one or two people per team. **1** Some will not like it, but that is no shame and no loss to the club. Those who survive the first game often go on to enjoy the next... and soon they are on their way. After several more games most umpires are ready for the course and their Level 1 Umpire badge.

So someone wants to umpire?

Whether a club member has offered, or has been asked, to try umpiring hockey, that very first game with the whistle is a daunting prospect.

Your main aim, as team captain or club's umpiring manager, is for the experience to leave the new umpire keen to try a second and third game.

Soon you'll have one more on your 'can umpire' list, and in time perhaps a regular club umpire.

Be sure to provide these tips and a current Rule Book to study for some days before the game. **2**

3 tips for picking the right game

Inexperienced umpires need easy games to build confidence. So choose a friendly or run-of-the-mill league fixture, and avoid the unnecessary pressures of a relegation or promotion clash, cup tie, or any long-standing 'needle match'. **3**

Better still to use a youth game, with U-14 or U-16 on a full pitch being more relevant than mini-hockey. **4**

Even a new umpire will know the rules better than the players, who should not yet have learnt the tricks of disrespecting and undermining umpires.

If it must be adult hockey, be aware that the more veterans, school-teachers, coaches, or even umpires, among either team, the more confidence-sapping 'feedback' the new umpire might get. **5**

Captains...

... are responsible for their players' behaviour.

That means dealing with whatever might undermine the first timer's fragile confidence, before it affects the umpiring, and spoils the game for everyone. **6**

You could move any trouble-maker off to the substitutes' bench, or under the nose of the veteran umpire. If that leaves 5 left backs marking 4 right wings, then maybe it was the wrong game?

6 tips for the umpiring colleague

You have the rare privilege to be shepherding a potential umpire through this crucial first game.

During the chat before, after, and at half time, be positive and encouraging. Recall the best decisions. **7**

Ask how the umpire feels, and listen before offering advice, which should be in terms of "if you do this, that will work better", rather than "don't...". **8**

It helps if you, as experienced colleague, can deal with all the timing, scoring, and cards. But for practice, encourage the first timer to whistle the captains together, and again to start the game. **9**

And getting the feel of umpiring teamwork is as important as the decision-making. So set out who umpires each area, and make lots of eye contact. **10**

Of course new umpires miss some offences and make mistakes. But the more decisions they can make by themselves, the more confident they and the players will be that they can umpire. So respect the areas of control you agreed in the pre-match chat, and wait for the look that says "Help?" before signalling. **11**

If it is the right game, and the new umpire has prepared well, everything should go fine. But if anything serious does start, then step across and protect your new colleague: remind captains of their responsibilities; take on any criticism of the umpiring team; and if necessary use your cards. **12**

Acknowledgements

The original paper's advice was collected from various sources, including the England Hockey web site, Jane Nockolds' book A Guide to Umpiring Hockey, and the Umpiring Development Skills & Advice archive at www.fieldhockeyforum.com.

This edition, the 4th since 2008, has a few changes to track the significant development in rules but, in general, the advice remains the same.

And finally: special thanks to those umpires who survived their first game using earlier versions of this paper, and who now have, or will soon obtain, their Level 1 Umpire award.

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First game survival – 20 tips for the umpire

You have been offered your very first game as a hockey umpire. These tips will help you rise to the challenge and enjoy it.

Check that the game is right for you, as per tips 3-5 overleaf. If not, then your first survival tip is to say: “No thanks. Let someone else umpire that one.” **1**

3 tips on the Rule Book

You do not need to know all the Rules yet, but to survive you must learn a few Rules really well.

Borrow a Rule Book, or google ‘FIH Rules Hockey’ and print out pages 1-50 of 2015 Outdoor Rules as 4 pages of rules per sheet of A4, plus page 54. **2**

Rule 11 (umpires) is your job description, and the basic umpiring skills and signals on pages 45-50 spell out how to succeed at it. **3**

As a regular player or spectator, you will know most of the conduct-of-play rules 9 and 10, and the restart rules 6 and 7. Spend most time getting certain of rules 12 (what penalty) and 13 (procedures). **4**

Study as much else in the Rule Book as you can, and if possible watch some respected umpires in action.

2 tips for the day

Wear a bright colour, different from either team. Then the umpires can spot each other quickly: working together as the third team on the field. **5**

Be there a good half hour before the game starts. Your umpiring colleague will want a chat and to answer your questions. You can ask your colleague to deal with all the timing, scoring, and cards. **6**

Then the only ‘umpiring tool’ you need is a whistle, which someone will lend you if you don’t own one.

Allow time afterwards to unwind with your colleague and players. They will want to praise you for doing so well – don’t miss out on that.

9 tips for when the game starts

The first time you think “Oi!” or “Hey umpire...”, that’s you! So blow your whistle loud and clear, and point the way the free hit is to be played.

The first few offences you spot: blow every one. **7**

You will very soon settle into the rhythm of umpiring decisions, and see when the whistle is not needed:

- no offence = play on;
- offence but no disadvantage = play on;
- offence causing disadvantage = whistle and signal the right penalty from Rule 12.

Blow the whistle sharply and signal definitely, with straight arms, hands at eye level, broad shoulders. **8**

Call out “Play it” or “You have it” whenever you signal advantage or decide there is no offence. **9**

That tells players and your colleague that you saw what happened and have made your decision.

When the ball goes off your backline or side of the pitch you should just signal not whistle. **10**

Do look at how the players react to each decision, and don’t bother where the ball has gone. With that eye contact they see a confident umpire, whatever you might be feeling inside. **11**

And don’t stop umpiring when the whistle blows. More decisions will follow quickly: is the restart in the right place; are players 5 metres; did the ball go directly into the circle, etc? Be ready for them. **12**

Mobility is important, so think ahead and move to keep play roughly between the umpires. Then, as play comes into your circle, move close to the goal, where the biggest decisions are made. **13**

The clearest view is 5 to 10 metres from play, which will feel odd, being so much closer than the familiar ‘spectator’ view. But you must “see what happens here”, rather than “watch play over there”. **14**

The pre-match chat will agree which areas of the pitch are yours to umpire. Beyond that, only blow if the other umpire has clearly not seen a bad foul. And never blow anything in the far circle, but keep watching so that, when your colleague does look for your help, you are ready to signal how you saw it. **15**

5 tips in case it goes wrong

Accept that you will not get it all right first time. If you miss something, never try to ‘even it up’ with the next penalty. Just look out for the next thing to happen, and make that decision right. **16**

Bad fouls must be penalised, even if the whistle comes much too late; “Sorry, I’m not letting that go.”

When you realise your initial decision was wrong (on your own, or with your colleague’s help) then do change it to the fair decision. But then hold the restart until both sides have re-set, and whistle play back if it was taken too quickly. **17**

When it seems you are wrong on a big decision in your circle, it calms players if you stop time and meet with the other umpire. You can find out what your colleague saw and check which rules apply. But then the decision is still yours to award and signal. **18**

Don’t let appeals make or change your decision. Smile and tell them “Yes I saw it too” if you agree, and “Not how I saw it” if they are mistaken; and “No need to appeal, thank you” either way. **19**

If any back-chat starts to upset you, then stop time and bring together your colleague and both captains, who must make their players behave. The dissent is their fault, not yours, so do not feel bad about it. **20**

If you have been given the right game and followed these tips, it will never come to that.

But even if it does, have you survived? Yes!

Once you have done it

Despite being your first game as an umpire, you can and should enjoy it.

You will make mistakes; that is how you learn.

The more you umpire the better you will be.

So try and umpire another game soon. Watch other umpires and ask them about umpiring; they will be glad to offer more tips and help you improve.

After several games you should be ready to take the umpire course. Not many months after that, you could be a qualified Level 1 Umpire.